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## The contribution of women in small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods in Ghana



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# Abbreviations and acronyms

## **CEDAW**

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

## **COVID-19**

Coronavirus disease 2019

## **DOVVSU**

Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit

## **FAO**

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

## **FC**

Fisheries Committee

## **GBV**

gender-based violence

## **GDO**

Gender Desk Officer

## **MOFAD**

Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development

## **NAFPTA**

National Fish Processors and Traders Association

## **SSF GUIDELINES**

Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

## **USAID**

United States Agency for International Development

# Acknowledgements

This work was undertaken as part of the FAO sub-programme titled “Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for gender equitable and climate resilient food systems and livelihoods”, financed under the Flexible Voluntary Contributions Mechanism, and utilizes results from the Illuminating Hidden Harvests initiative. This brief is part of a series of Small-Scale Fisheries and Gender Briefs that has been developed to shed light on the contribution of small-scale fisheries, and particularly the women working in them, to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods. This brief was developed by FAO NFI colleagues Jennifer Gee, Matteo Luzzi, Rachel Matheson, Roxane Misk, Molly Ahern, Lena Westlund and Nicole Franz, as well as by Yaa Danso (FAO Ghana), Esther Wahaga (CSIR Food and Research Institute), Baviina Safia Musah (Tetra Tech) and Lydia Sasu (Development Action Association). The brief benefitted from contributions and validation from technical experts at the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MOFAD), the CSIR Food and Research Institute, the Development Action Association, Tetra Tech, the University of Ghana, and Women in Law and Development in Africa, and local small-scale fisheries organizations. The authors would also like to thank FAO NFI colleague Manoela Militão de Siqueira for her editing support, as well as Maria Giannini for proofreading and Joanne Morgante for design and layout.





# 1

## Introduction

The small-scale fisheries sector has an essential role in transforming the food system of Ghana. It contributes to ending poverty and hunger through healthy and sustainable diets and equitable livelihoods.

Gender equality is a basic human right that is fundamental to achieving gender-equitable small-scale fisheries in Ghana. Data estimates show that almost 90 000 women are estimated

to depend upon the small-scale fisheries sector in the country for their livelihoods (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2023). Although women are less present in the harvesting phase of the value chain because of restrictive gender norms, they are largely engaged in post-harvest activities such as processing and trading.

Beyond women's involvement in fish value chains, women play an essential role in

**FIGURE 1**  
**Ghana**



ARTISANAL MARINE CATCHES CONTRIBUTED ABOUT

**64-74%** OF TOTAL MARINE CATCHES IN GHANA FROM 2006 TO 2016

**2.7 MILLION**

PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY DEPEND ON THE FISHERIES SECTOR FOR THEIR LIVELIHOODS

**18%** OF THESE PEOPLE ARE PREDOMINANTLY WOMEN ENGAGED IN FISH PROCESSING AND DISTRIBUTION

THE FISHERIES SECTOR CONTRIBUTES TO

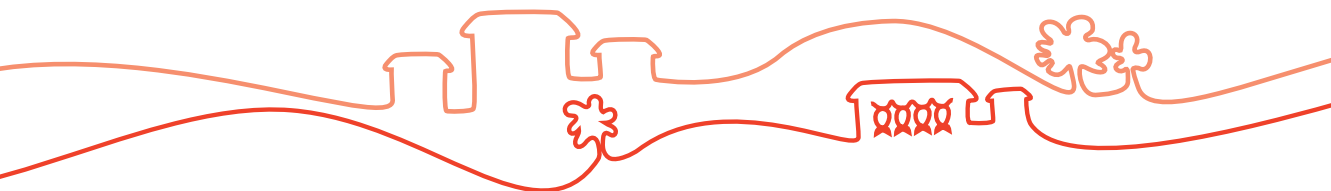
**3.5%**  
OF THE NATIONAL GDP

Source: Eriksen, S. S., Akpalu, W. & Vondolia, G. K. 2018. *The Fisheries Sector in Ghana: A Political Economy Analysis*.

food and nutrition security through their responsibilities in provision and preparation of food consumed in their home. However, research indicates that, compared to men, they often bear a disproportionate work burden (Grassi, Landberg and Huyer, 2015). The responsibility of unpaid domestic and care work is usually assigned to women based on gendered social norms. Combined with work within the community, this results in a triple work burden for women, whose income levels, livelihoods and food security are therefore impacted and limits their opportunities for formal, full-time paid employment, training and career advancement (UN Women, 2020).

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) set out guidelines for action and policy to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries. In particular, Chapter 8 of the SSF Guidelines highlights the crucial need to integrate gender mainstreaming into small-scale fisheries development strategies as a way to challenge practices that are detrimental to women (FAO, 2015). Indeed, this brief targets social, cultural, economic and political constraints as crucial aspects to be tackled in the Ghanaian context through tailored interventions at the national level, specifically in small-scale fisheries.

Furthermore, the SSF Guidelines call for compliance with international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This brief will further examine these instruments in connection with national policies aimed at realizing gender equality. Recognizing this call, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) elaborated and published an in-depth handbook, *Towards Gender-Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries – In support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication*. The handbook was developed to support gender-equitable small-scale fisheries by enhancing the understanding of their gender dimensions, with a focus on the specific role and conditions of women in the small-scale fisheries sector (Biswas, 2017). Strengthening commitment and implementation of the SSF Guidelines, particularly in relation to addressing gender equality – but also food loss and waste, and promoting equitable trade, governance and utilization of fish – can help safeguard and enhance the benefits of small-scale fisheries for sustainable development in Ghana.



# 2

## National context

### 2.1 Legal framework, policies and regulations on gender equality and women's empowerment in Ghana

At the international level, Ghana has ratified the main conventions on gender equality, including CEDAW in 1985, the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in 1995, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Women's Rights, also known as the Maputo Protocol, in 2003. Ghana has also ratified and implemented other

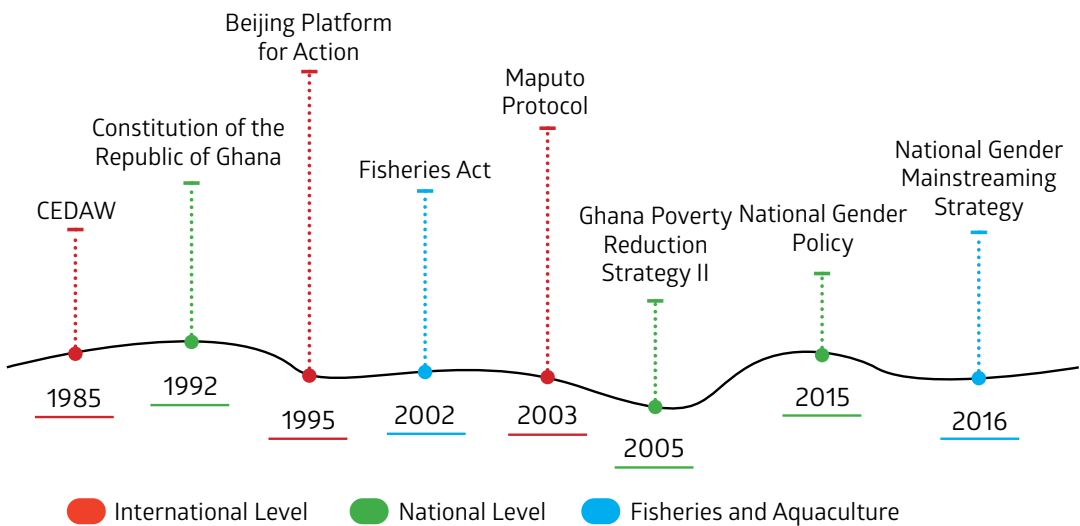
international instruments targeting gender equality, including the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals and the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (MOGCSP, 2015).

At the national level, although Ghana was the first African country to gain independence, in 1957, its Constitution is much more recent: Article 17 (1) and (2) of the 1992 Constitution prohibits



**FIGURE 2**

**A timeline for gender in the legal framework and policies of Ghana**



Sources: MoGCSP. 2015. *National Gender Policy – Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment into Ghana's Development Efforts*. Accra, Ghana; FAO. n.d. *FAOLEX database: legislative database of national laws and regulations on food, agriculture and renewable natural resources*. Rome, FAO.

discrimination based on gender, among others, and enables affirmative actions to tackle discrimination (MOGCSP, 2015). However, even though the Constitution calls for equality for all persons and prohibits direct discrimination on the basis of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed, or social or economic status, Article 17 has been criticized for its lack of conformity with Article 1 of CEDAW owing to the lack of provisions targeting indirect discrimination (CEDAW, 2014).

Other key national frameworks and laws related to gender equality and women's empowerment are the 2007 Domestic Violence Act, which criminalized gender-based violence and led to the establishment of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU), and the 2003 Labour Act, which calls for equal pay without discrimination, but does not have specific targets directly linked to gender equality. Despite these frameworks, enforcement and support for victims remain a challenge. As reported by USAID, MOFAD and FC (2022), addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in rural areas is still a sensitive issue, as reporting from victims is hampered by insufficient resourcing for DOVVSUs (including a low number across the country) and lack of GBV training for police forces. Financial constraints also drive low rates of reporting by victims of GBV, since reporting cases of GBV often leads to very high costs for victims, who must pay for their medical assessment and may be asked to pay for fuel or transportation to arrest the perpetrator. As a result, many women instead rely on informal reporting and support systems, including reporting to traditional leaders at landing sites; however, these systems may be subject to bias and impacted by social norms and relations (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022).

For what concerns asset ownership, the Wills Act does not set clear guidelines for inheritance by children, and neither formal nor customary

laws set equal opportunities for both spouses to own assets through marriage, especially for women (Oduro and Ackah, 2017). Although some acts, such as the Intestate Succession Act, have improved inheritance practices especially for widows, implementation for women still results in low ownership figures (Oduro and Ackah, 2017).

In 1975, Ghana set up the National Council on Women and Development (NCDW), a national mechanism that aimed at supporting governmental efforts to foster women's empowerment through income generation but also social mobilization and development. Over the years, the NCDW (now the Department of Gender) evolved and acted as a liaison between governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies and civil society organizations while also acting as a key actor in the set-up of improved administrative frameworks for the achievement of women's empowerment, including the creation of Gender Desk Officers (GDOs) to be included in national offices, departments and agencies (MOGCSP, 2015). However, the capacity of these GDOs experiences weakness in terms of coordination with line ministries, thus making the integration of gender perspectives into sectoral or district policy formulation quite inconsistent (JICA, 2013). Moreover, GDOs have faced limited capacity, low rates of retention and cannot be held accountable by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection as their appointments are discretionary, thus limiting the effectiveness of the GDO system as well as gender mainstreaming (Britt *et al.*, 2020).

The National Gender Policy was approved in 2015 with the aim to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment at the governmental level, thus targeting different issues affecting Ghanaian women, girls and children at the legal, social, civic, political, economic and sociocultural levels (MOGCSP,

2015). These issues range from women's rights and access to justice to accountability of governance structures and existing gender roles and relations shaping inequalities at the grassroots of society in the country. Following the National Gender Policy, an implementation plan was designed in 2016, but encountered several implementation challenges, especially in terms of operational obstacles for the coordination among national and regional stakeholders or agencies (Britt *et al.*, 2020).

The major gaps in policy implementation and action towards gender equality in Ghana are attributable not only to a lack of political accountability and capacity gaps within public institutions, but also to financial issues across ministries or levels of government (Britt *et al.*, 2020). The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection usually struggles to work in synergy with other sector ministries, with investment and budgeting for gender-sensitive planning and activities significantly reduced, also as a consequence of a lack of awareness about gender issues at the local level (Britt *et al.*, 2020). In addition to this, as reported by Britt *et al.* (2020), the budget of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is almost entirely dedicated to social protection programmes, thus leaving just a minor part of allocation to potential activities specifically targeting gender-based constraints and issues.

Although gender issues and gender equality seem to have gained a wider space in the Ghanaian political agenda and legal frameworks, barriers persist to achieving long-lasting results. The lack of clear prioritization and inefficient monitoring and evaluation systems at the governmental level slows down the process for the disruption of gender inequalities, while implementation of existing legislation tackling those inequalities suffers from significant lack of funding and unavailability of sex-disaggregated data (Britt *et al.*, 2020; Oduro and Ackah, 2017).

Additionally, although national strategies such as the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GPRS I and II) and the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA I and II) have included gender-sensitive provisions for tackling gender inequalities at the national level, these efforts still miss an intersectional lens to understand and address the complexities of women as a heterogeneous group (Oduro, 2008).

In the fisheries sector, the Fisheries Act of 2002 focused mainly on capture fisheries, thus overlooking the contribution of women in strict relation to the post-harvest sector (EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019).

In December 2016, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development Fisheries Commission formally adopted the National Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) for the Fisheries Sector. This strategy aims to empower women in the fisheries sector by supporting their active participation in fisheries management and decision-making and by facilitating access to and control over resources (MOFAD, 2016). The strategy also recognizes women's roles and contributions in the sector and "provides legitimacy to the Fisheries Commission's extension support to the post-harvest processing sector" (Torell *et al.*, 2019). The Fisheries Commission now requires sex-disaggregated attendance sheets at all meetings to record the number of men and women, which is an important step in generating data and building awareness (Torell *et al.*, 2019). The GMS also established a Gender Unit in the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, with a direct link to the Fisheries Commission, as a priority that would enable gender awareness in training programmes at the institutional and implementation levels (MOFAD, 2016). However, the GMS was never fully implemented, limiting its effectiveness in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the sector (personal communication,

2023). The Government of Ghana is currently in the process of assessing gendered vulnerabilities in the sector with the goal of publishing a new Gender Mainstreaming Strategy that can be operationalized to address current gender issues in the fisheries industry.

Co-management committees play an important role in fisheries governance in Ghana whereby decision-making authority is shared between Fisheries Commission staff and local fisheries stakeholders. Decision-making is done through consensus building to generate buy-in and voluntary compliance of management measures (MOFAD, 2020). The Co-Management Policy for Fisheries recognizes the impacts that fishery management has on women's livelihoods and calls for women's active participation in Co-Management Committees. According to the policy, small-scale Community-Based Co-Management Committees must be composed of stakeholders involved in fisheries and must include women. Similarly, although the committees for Large Scale Fishery Management Units do not explicitly require women, the National Fish Processors and Traders Association, of whom the majority of members are women, is named as an important stakeholder to be included. To further strengthen women's representation in the management of large-scale fisheries, the participation of women in these committees should be explicitly documented (MOFAD, 2020).

## 2.2 Sociocultural and economic context

While Ghana has achieved remarkable results in terms of poverty reduction across the years and has been classified as a lower middle-income country in 2011, the trend has more recently started to stall: whereas the country's national poverty rate was halved from 1991 to 2012, the decrease of the rate from 2012 to 2016 amounted to only a 0.8 percent reduction, thus reaching 23.4 percent (World Bank, 2020). Social

inequalities, including nonhomogeneous poverty rates across different regions of the country, still play a pivotal role in defining marginalization and exclusion in Ghana – with the COVID-19 emergency likely to raise the poverty level to almost 31 percent in 2021 (El-Horr *et al.*, 2022; World Bank, 2020). An example of differences across regions is related to education: even if more than 50 percent of women in Ghana have attained a secondary education, the differences of secondary education rates between northern (between 41 percent and 49 percent) and southern regions (between 60 percent and 65 percent) is remarkable (El-Horr *et al.*, 2022).

Unemployment rates in the country are thriving as a result of insufficient job opportunities for young people, thus causing low value-added activities to be regarded as prominent labour opportunities and leaving youth unemployment



### Socioeconomic statistics

**GHANA** ranked **130th** out of 170 countries on the **GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX** (UNDP, n.d.)

**58 percent** of women held a **SECONDARY EDUCATION DEGREE** at the age of **25 OR OLDER** compared to **73 percent** of men (UNDP, n.d.)

**81 percent** of women aged 15 to 49 years **DO NOT OWN A HOUSE** and **78 percent DO NOT OWN LAND** (USAID, 2020)

The **ADOLESCENT BIRTH RATE** is **64.2 births** per 1000 women aged 15 to 19 years (UNDP, n.d.)

at almost 10 percent, which is even more significant when compared to the overall 4.7 percent total unemployment rate at the country level (El-Horr *et al.*, 2022; World Bank, 2020). In this context, approximately 90 percent of all economic activities involve informal employment, exposing self-employed workers to higher uncertainty and vulnerability, particularly affecting women (El-Horr *et al.*, 2022). Women face higher unemployment rates compared to men in almost all regions in the country and also face serious wage inequalities, especially when living in rural areas (El-Horr *et al.*, 2022).

According to the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, fisheries in Ghana are a major source of employment, livelihood and act as a catalyst to other economic activities that shape life in the country both on the coastline and on inland waters (MOFAD, 2016).

In Ghana, the role of women in the fishing sector is highly defined by traditional gendered roles,

putting men at the centre of fishing activities and limiting women's responsibility to fish processing and marketing. However, despite the gendered division of labour, it has been observed that many women own boats, specifically vessels and canoes, thus acting as financiers of fishing expeditions but also as employers for men willing to fish for them (MOFAD, 2016; Kyei-Gyamfi, 2022).

As evidence stresses the constraining power of cultural norms and practices in the fisheries sector, the practical results of these societal conventions are also clear: women tend to experience work overload and exploitation while their access to resources and opportunities is still insufficient to meet their full level of empowerment (MOFAD, 2016).

Although women may have access to financial power and assets that enable them to gain authority and decrease their exposure to poverty, the majority of them still perform



## BOX 1

### Gender-based discrimination and violence against women

- In Ghana, the social norms putting men at the centre of household decision-making are the result of widespread masculinity, which is part of consolidated patriarchal relations.\* In some cases, this fosters intimate-partner violence towards women partners.
- In a study conducted in Elmina, women reported engaging in transactional sex to cope with lack of capital and income. Fish-for-sex is also a key driver of HIV spread among women in fishing communities.\*\*

### CHILD LABOUR

Child labour is a common issue in Ghanaian small-scale fisheries. Girls who are involved in child labour are at risk of dropping out of school and commonly end up working as domestic servants or prostitutes.\*\*\*

Notes: \*Sikweyiya, Y., Addo-Lartey, A. A., Alangea, D. O., Dako-Gyeke, P., Chirwa, E. D., Coker-Appiah, D., ... & Jewkes, R. 2020. *Patriarchy and gender-inequitable attitudes as drivers of intimate partner violence against women in the central region of Ghana*. BMC public health, 20, 1-11; \*\*Kyei-Gyamfi, S. 2022. *Fish-for-Sex (FFS) and Risk of HIV Infection among Fishers in Elmina Fishing Community in Ghana*. African Human Mobility Review, 8(2); \*\*\*Torell, E., Bilecki, D., Owusu, A., Crawford, B., Beran, K. & Kent, K., 2019. *Assessing the Impacts of Gender Integration in Ghana's Fisheries Sector*. Coastal Management, 47:6, 507-526.

activities that are less remunerative and, in consequence, have reduced access to income compared to men in the fisheries value chain. This vulnerability, coupled with men's control of fish resources, pushes women towards transactional sex practices, which can also make HIV infections more recurrent (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2022). In addition to this, low catches and depleting fish stocks, especially of small pelagic fisheries, further increase women's economic vulnerability by threatening their businesses, thus increasing the risk of transactional sex practices within communities (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022).

Child labour in fisheries is a pervasive challenge in Ghana affecting both boys and girls, including cases of the worst forms of child labour (Box 1). Boys are likely to be trafficked and forced to work in dangerous fishing operations in Lake Volta, while girls end up as domestic servants or in prostitution. Some families migrate and leave children behind, resulting in high rates of school dropout (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022). On the other hand, some children, particularly young children who cannot be left alone, also migrate with their families to follow fishing opportunities, and as a result never or, inconsistently, return to school (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022; personal communication, 2023). Even where children remain with their parents in coastal fishing communities, boys engage in fishing and girls work in smoking sheds, which keeps them out of school and in child labour arrangements (Torell *et al.*, 2019).

Single women-headed households are often the most vulnerable, as single women face poverty, isolation and therefore a higher risk of trafficking and GBV (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022). Migrant fishers leave their spouses and children without financial support for school fees or food, which heightens the risk of exploitation through trafficking and child labour (Adeborna and Johnson, 2015).

Similarly, migrant fishers may have multiple intimate partners along their migration routes, increasing the prevalence of single women-headed households and the risk of GBV because of heightened intimate partner conflict (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022; personal communication, 2023). In response to this challenge, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development has adopted a Strategy on Anti-Child Labour and Trafficking in Fisheries. Gender equity is a guiding principle in this strategy alongside other related issues, such as poverty reduction and respect for children's rights. Combatting child labour and trafficking requires a multipronged effort that includes awareness-raising, support for remediation and reintegration, as well as financial and technical support directed at the most vulnerable households.

### 2.3 Sex-disaggregated data – Employment

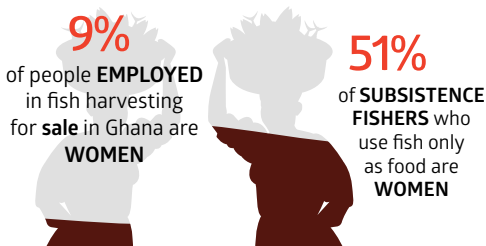
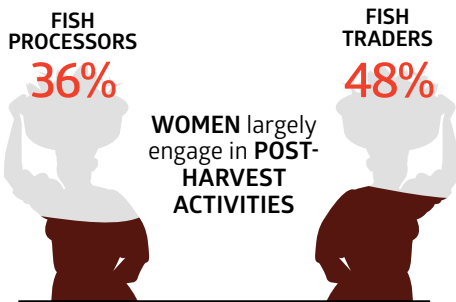
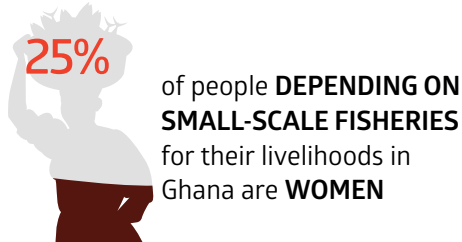
Following the demand for more comprehensive gender statistics, as discussed at United Nations conferences in the 1990s, Ghana has shifted its focus regarding data collection and sexdisaggregated data: once the provision of statistics targeting women in isolation was deemed insufficient, this clarified the need to adopt a wider approach considering the relationship occurring between women and men (MOGCSP, 2017).

According to an assessment led by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in collaboration with the Ghana Statistical Service in 2017, the country still lacks a national policy regarding the production of gender statistics, which puts resolutions of the issue in jeopardy, as every ministry, department or agency may have or not have a specific gender policy or provision. The ministry itself is the only one among all the institutions in Ghana to have produced gender statistics as a key point in its mandate (MOGCSP, 2017).





**FIGURE 3**  
**Sex-disaggregated data**



Data estimates. Source: Adapted from FAO, Duke University & WorldFish. 2023. *Illuminating Hidden Harvests - The contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development*. Rome, FAO.

While national statistics build on data from routine surveys and administrative data derived from different sources, the same fragmentation applies to gender statistics, as every actor produces its own data (UNICEF, 2022). The Ghana Statistical Service offers support to each ministry, department and agency to ensure that data are thoroughly validated and meet sufficient quality standards, and also provides funding and technical support to assist each

actor in the data collection process. However, the real issues seem to lie beneath the surface: despite large data availability and existing infrastructure, there is limited understanding among data custodians not only about the typology of data needed to report on gender statistics, but also regarding the impact of these statistics at the subnational level (UNICEF, 2022).

When it comes to data dissemination, Ghanaian institutions mainly rely on workshops, forums and publications, but also on websites and social media platforms (MOGCSP, 2017). However, although some reports contain robust data, they often rely on a small number of indicators, and data are not made available to a wider audience (UNICEF, 2022).

Data dissemination is only one among many challenges to producing sound gender data for Ghana's national statistics. Lack of institutional programming and awareness has weakened the capacity to set clear objectives and create strong monitoring systems regarding the compilation of gender statistics. Human resources and capacity development are insufficient: staff lack awareness of the current gender issues affecting the country, but also struggle to understand why sex-disaggregated data are fundamental to support informed decision-making (MOGCSP, 2017). In addition to this, budget constraints limit the attainment of data collection, and this impacts the quality of gender statistics, especially at the local level, where district assemblies also struggle to coordinate with the national gender office (MOGCSP, 2017). Institutions providing gender statistics usually work individually and do not interact with others, thus leaving the data within each institution and making specific administrative data incompatible with any use of statistical purpose at a broader level (UNICEF, 2022).

# 3

## Methodology

Information for this brief comes from a review of the available literature as well as from primary data collected through gender-sensitive surveys conducted as part of an FAO small-scale fisheries study.<sup>1</sup> Primary data were collected in Ghana between 22 September 2020 and 4 November 2020. Data collection methods included individual questionnaires (n = 295), focus group discussions (n = 40) and key informant interviews (n = 7). All respondents of the individual questionnaires were women. The study took place in seven locations: the four located on the coast were in the Western Region, Greater Accra and

Central Region, while the three located on inland waters were in the Eastern Region, Volta Region and Oti Region.

The literature review involved using electronic databases to identify journal articles as well as grey literature, national and international statistics reports, and national and international policies and regulations. The literature review was used to validate data from the FAO smallscale fisheries surveys as well as to provide additional context to clarify gender dynamics in Ghanaian fisheries.

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<sup>1</sup> The data for this brief were collected as part of a FAO small-scale fisheries study conducted under the Empowering women in small-scale fisheries for sustainable food systems (FGCP/GLO/645/NOR) project funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, as well as through the continuation of this work under the project titled Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for gender-equitable and climate-resilient food systems and livelihoods (FMM/GLO/155/MUL), funded by the Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism, now Flexible Volunteer Contributions (FVC) (FAO, 2023).



# 4

## Gender in the small-scale fisheries value chains

### 4.1 Understanding gender and the role of women in small-scale fisheries in Ghana

Although gendered division of labour and social norms tailor specific roles to women and men in fisheries value chains, reality can be more complex, and the case of Ghanaian fisheries is a good example of value chains where women can also step into roles that traditionally are guaranteed to men.

Women often play a large role in all post-harvest activities, making up the majority of fish processors and fish marketers (Ameyaw *et al.*, 2020; Torell *et al.*, 2019; MOFAD, 2020), while they are only nominally represented in capture fisheries (Adjei, 2021). As processors and marketers, women generate substantial wealth for households (Ameyaw *et al.*, 2020). Women consulted in the FAO study reported processing and trading as their main activities providing income at the household level, with 91 percent of their income coming from fish-related activities (FAO, 2023). Fish smoking is the main processing method used by more than half of women in the study; they spend nearly a third of their weekly time on fish processing (FAO, 2023). Fish processing and trading are also a family business; many women enter the business through family connections and because of a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities (personal communication, 2023). Women are also likely to be the majority

of informal and non-documented workers in fisheries value chains, thus performing activities such as “fish pickers”, where women look for fish parts left on the beach to be sold, or head porters transporting fish (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022).

Fish processors and traders are often distinguished into two groups: “fish wives” and “fish mammies”. Fish wives obtain fish from their husbands or another male relative and primarily sell fish at small scale, while fish mammies are involved in larger-scale processing and trading (Ameyaw *et al.*, 2020). Another interesting position that women sometimes hold in the fish value chain is the role of the *konkohemaa*, the head of fishmongers/processors. In this role, the woman *konkohemaa* has the power not only to set prices and intervene in dispute management (especially regarding reporting of GBV at landing sites), but also has a significant amount of decision-making power because of the leadership position held within the community (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022).

In addition to these entrepreneurial roles, women are also employed as paid and unpaid workers in small-scale fisheries. Young women are often hired by processors to carry fish from the beach to the home of the processor, and through this engagement they learn processing skills which can later be applied in their own processing businesses (personal

communication, 2023). The daughters of fish processors may also be enlisted to assist with processing operations, restricting them from attending school (personal communication, 2023).

Although women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study claimed that men were in charge of most fishing responsibilities, examples from Ghana have seen women involved in gleaning and nearshore fishing, as well as fishing in estuaries where they collect crabs and oysters (Torell *et al.*, 2019; Harper *et al.*, 2013). However, their activities and contribution to fishing are often underrepresented in national statistics and fisheries management (Torell *et al.*, 2019). Even if barriers to entering the fisheries sector are minimal in terms of required education and capital, many women in communities require support from their husbands to access processing equipment, as they face extreme poverty at the individual level and generally start working in the sector only because of family ties (Matsue, Daw and Garrett, 2014; Torell *et al.*, 2019).

The impact of social norms and cultural belief is often consistent in Ghanaian small-scale fisheries. Women's roles as fish processors and traders are assumed to be naturally aligned with their household responsibilities (Ameyaw *et al.*, 2020), while fishing is considered a male domain because it is physically demanding and dangerous (Adjei, 2021). Some women may be permitted to join men on boats in what are regarded as supporting roles, but this is often limited only to younger women who accompany their male partners (Adjei, 2021). In general, this division of roles was considered natural by the respondents interviewed by Adjei (2021), as women were perceived not to have the physical strength to perform the necessary tasks associated with fishing. However, women's exclusion from fishing is not just a question of strength, but also of skills and experience,

evidencing how gender norms that are ascribed to bodies and explained as natural obfuscate how gender inequalities in access to knowledge, skills and opportunities perpetuate these gendered roles (Adjei, 2021). Women in the FAO study also do not support these norms; women claimed to disagree with the fact that men should be the sole members of organizations, the only ones able to control earnings or to be engaged in fishing and trading (FAO, 2023).

The fact that (primarily) women's bodies menstruate contributes to the social norms restricting women's participation in fishing. Fishing was described as work that is spiritual, which can be impacted by menstruation, a function which is considered to be an unclean act that can bring bad luck and pollute the water (Adjei, 2021). These norms are gradually changing, due in part to increased access to sanitary pads, improved sources of drinking water and general shifts in gender beliefs (Adjei, 2021).

The role of women as fish processors and traders, as well as in fish procurement and preparation for their families, is critical to food and nutrition security in Ghana. Fish represents over 50 percent of the animal protein intake in Ghanaian diets (FAO, 2018a), making access to healthy, affordable fish a vital component of food security. While premium species such as seabream and red snapper are often unaffordable for household consumption, families in Ghana rely on small pelagics such as sardines and mackerel for food and micronutrients (Taylor, 2022). As fish processors, women prepare smoked and dried fish at relatively affordable prices, which can be consumed in households without access to electricity and storage facilities (Overå, 2007). Similarly, as fish traders, women sell a variety of fish and fish products in markets and other areas that ensure fish protein is available to rural and urban consumers (Overå, 2022). Since

certain forms of processing can reduce the amount of micronutrients in fish while improper handling increases the risk of contamination (Hasselberg *et al.*, 2020; Chittchang *et al.*, 1999), the processing methods and technologies used by processors can play a key role in food and nutrition security, so these should be targeted by capacity development and technology transfer efforts.

## 4.2 (Equal) voice and decision-making power

In accordance with the gendered division of labour shaping Ghanaian small-scale fisheries, women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study reported a higher degree of decision-making power around fish processing, buying, storage and marketing/trading, with lesser decision-making power related to fishing activities, as these are more related to men's responsibilities (FAO, 2023). Perception of women's involvement in fisheries decisions can slightly differ between men and women. While men considered their wives as partners in fisheries businesses and stated that they discussed decisions about purchases and repairs with their wives, women stated that they often had to convince their husbands of decisions and only had a strong influence when their husbands were away due to migration, sickness or age (Adjei, 2021).

However, women's confidence, decision-making power and access to leadership opportunities can be improved, particularly when supported by relevant policies and programmes. In Ghana, trainings on fisheries management conducted through a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) improved women's confidence and enhanced recognition that women's views are important in fisheries management (Torell *et al.*, 2019). Training participants also developed leadership skills, as demonstrated in contentious debates about closed seasons where trainees were

able to lead participants into more peaceful discussions (Torell *et al.*, 2019).

When women own boats, they also have a stronger influence in the fisheries value chain and gain more decision-making power, especially regarding expeditions where they provide their own vessel for fishing activities. Women usually inherit or buy boats, but when it comes to boat operations and fishing, decision-making power still seems to be held mostly by husbands or relatives fishing on the boats (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). To avoid loss of decision-making power, women in the USAID-funded project reported hiring outsiders instead of family members in order to ensure that the boat owners' decisions about fishing activities were respected (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). Despite low numbers of women boat owners, they sometimes continue on to hold important positions in boat owners' associations (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). In some examples, women had financial influence in determining some changes in the value chain, such as boycotting fish obtained through illegal and dangerous practices or refusing to buy fish on Tuesday, as it is a resting day for fish traders (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015).

Even though women have an increasing influence in fishing expeditions, fishermen mostly make decisions regarding fish harvesting methods without considering women's perspectives and opinions – even if these decisions lead to low profitability for women in the post-harvest node as a result of low fish quality (EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019). Lack of platforms to influence decision-making on harvesting techniques is a major issue, forcing women fish processors and fishmongers to bear the negative outcomes of fishermen's choices without the opportunity to intervene (EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019). Indeed, women's economic and decision-making power regarding

price setting does not always imply a sufficient degree of decision-making power within households and communities where women live and participate in the fish value chain, especially with regard to fisheries management and trade (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022).

At the community level, women continue to be marginalized from fishery resource management both because of the multiple demands on their time limiting their availability and because of gender norms about leadership and public participation. According to Mutimukuru-Maravanyika *et al.* (2017), women in a local fishing community in the Shama District (Western Region) were excluded from formal decision-making, which makes them more exposed to various challenges along the value chain and less able to bring their concerns to light through participatory processes. In fact, those women did not belong to any kind of organization, either at the local or national levels, and also struggled to take part in formal decision-making bodies at the community level (Mutimukuru-Maravanyika *et al.*, 2017). While women attend fisheries governance meetings, men dominate the leadership positions of community-based associations (Adjei, 2021). Patriarchal culture and social norms have a strong influence on this issue, as women hesitate to speak in public in groups where men are present (Mutimukuru-Maravanyika *et al.*, 2017). This point is supported by the findings of the FAO small-scale fisheries study in Ghana, as only 19 percent of women claimed to be able to speak up in public and have the leadership/influence to decide on projects, with the same percentage feeling comfortable enough to raise their voice and express their concerns (FAO, 2023).

Women's marginalization from fisheries governance is a lost opportunity for collaboration and cooperation between all fishery stakeholders, limiting the effectiveness

of management and enforcement actions. For example, one study found that when the (all male) beach committee in Gomoa Fetteh refused to allow fishers to land illegal fish, women did not support this effort and instead went to other landing sites to purchase fish (EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019). Similarly, a sustainable fisheries management project implemented by USAID in Ghana found that women who received training and who were actively involved in fisheries co-management had increased confidence and were involved in advocacy against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Women also supported a closed season for the fishery when fishermen were not yet ready to support the proposal (Torell *et al.*, 2019). By involving women in these decisions and by providing capacity development for all members, committees could foster buy-in and ensure that enforcement activities do not jeopardize women or men's incomes or food security.

### 4.3 (Equal) rights, access and control over resources

Among women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study, high prices and lack of money, but also scarcity and poor quality of fish in markets, affected the respondent's ability to buy fish (FAO, 2023). For some women, customer loyalty plays a role, as they would only deal with a specific fisherman, to the extent that when a particular fisherman does not have fish, they will not buy from anyone else (FAO, 2023). At times, women are forced to buy even the most expensive fish on the pretext that they will not be given any consignment when the cheaper fish arrive. However, in most cases (68 percent), women in the FAO study reported to be usually certain to access fish when needed (FAO, 2023).

Family ties also have a crucial role in determining access to fish for women fishmongers: when a boat reaches the landing site, the catch is split into *birefi* (shares of fish)

where half of the overall quantity of fish goes to the boat owner, while the other half goes to the crew. If the fishmonger is a woman, her husband usually gives or sells her the fish, but that informal agreement could be denied if someone outside the family finances the fishing trip (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). In this context, women are at risk of losing access to fish from their husbands. Even when women receive fish, they often need to pay for the catch or provide fuel in order to get fresh fish (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). In addition to this, when polygamy occurs, not all wives have the opportunity to work and some of them are constrained by household responsibilities (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). As a result, despite family connections, women's access to fish may be insecure and is reliant on the goodwill of others, limiting their economic empowerment.

Women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study mainly own assets related to fish processing equipment, fish storage equipment and means of communications rather than fishing equipment (FAO, 2023). Age is certainly another factor to consider: although young women can own canoes and processing equipment, they do not usually own assets and are thus limited to assisting wealthier individuals in their activities (EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019). Indeed, women in the Ada area have reported to be unable to access financial capital that could be used to purchase fishing equipment, such as canoes and breathing pumps useful for clam fishing activities (EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019). Due to a lack of access to formal credit and to socioeconomic status, poorer women rely on revolving funds, especially during the lean season, thus forcing them to reduce available capital that could be used to enhance their business practices (EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019).

Many post-harvest processors are involved in savings groups, which enables them to access

financial capital, as well as to build social capital that strengthens their networks of support for challenges such as child care and health (Torell *et al.*, 2019). A quantitative evaluation of a USAID-funded sustainable fisheries management project in Ghana found that participants received support in the form of trainings, village savings and loan associations, and microcredit. These services filled a critical gap in access to knowledge and financial capital, which helped strengthen micro, small and medium enterprises (Torell *et al.*, 2019). 95 percent of microcredit recipients, the majority of whom were women, were satisfied with their loan, which helped them purchase fish and business supplies, improve the quality of their products and production, increase their profits and support their families (Torell *et al.*, 2019).

Women's lack of access to physical and financial capital is also an issue of gendered power dynamics. Men are more likely to own assets and to have the resources to engage in fishing activities, which increases their power relative to women who may struggle to engage in the sector (personal communication, 2023). Additionally, women are expected to spend the money they earn on household needs and on their children, while men have more freedom to spend their money freely, thus limiting women's ability to invest in their businesses and increase their incomes (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015; EJF and Hen Mpoano, 2019).

In recent years, more women have been able to purchase and own boats, thus increasing their leverage in a traditionally male space (MOFAD, 2020; Torell, *et al.*, 2019; personal communication, 2023). Some women now provide financial credit to fishers intended to fund ice, fuel and net repairs, and the women then gain access to the fish caught by the fishers (Ameyaw *et al.*, 2020). Women who can purchase boats or finance fishing trips gain economic empowerment because they can



direct the fishing trips and gain more secure access to fresh fish (Ameyaw *et al.*, 2020). Asset ownership is a mechanism for increasing women's power, as they are able to direct fishing expeditions and more directly access fish without relying on their relationships with others in the sector.

#### 4.4 (Equal) rights and access to services, markets and decent work

In Ghana, women included in the FAO small-scale fisheries project reported relying on local small-scale fisherfolk to buy fish used for processing in 63 percent of the cases: this is mainly linked to proximity and reliability of local markets, thus making fish quality, freshness and price minor factors influencing fish purchase (FAO, 2023). However, 40 percent of women in the study reported buying from any fisher at landing sites as the more easily accessible option for accessing fresh and good quality fish. On the other hand, sometimes that choice is the only one available to access fish at a reasonable price (FAO, 2023).

According to women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study, fish availability is an issue reflecting seasonal changes: in fact, fish availability seems to be lower from March to July, and women have reported this decrease to be linked with higher prices and low availability of fish stocks (FAO, 2023). Sardinella (*Sardinella aurita*) and tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) are the main fish species consumed or that women in the FAO study deal with during their daily activities. In most cases, these women have reported low use of fish products such as fish powder or fish paste: when these products are used, it is mainly for consumption or to feed children (FAO, 2023).

In the FAO study, 72 percent of women respondents mentioned having access to landing sites. Access to these sites is not very easy for women in terms of transport, as 64

percent of women in the study use taxis to transport fish to selling points, while 21 percent walk and only a very small number of women use their own transport. Women in 73 percent of the cases bear additional costs to perform activities, as they have to pay the rental costs for the facilities they use for trading. In general, women have access to electricity, water and bathrooms in market facilities.

Despite available markets and the facilities available to women, knowledge and capacity development were not always easy to access for women in the FAO study, as more than half (54 percent) of them did not have access to fishery extension services. When presented with the opportunity to meet an extension officer, women reported having met officers of both sexes in the majority of cases (FAO, 2023). As reported also by Mutimukuru-Maravanyika *et al.* (2017), a lack of understanding of basic fisheries issues was very common in fishing communities where cultural beliefs could act as detrimental factors to good practices related to fisheries productivity and sustainability. Despite some cases where community members, especially fishers, showed good biological knowledge regarding fish, in most cases the gap in fisheries knowledge and fisheries management was attributed to the lack of effective fisheries extension services (Mutimukuru-Maravanyika *et al.*, 2017). Although some women have access to extension services, extension officers often lack adequate resources themselves to provide appropriate training and technologies to the processors (personal communication, 2023). Access to up-to-date information, technologies and skills is crucial to securing livelihoods and protecting fisheries, yet remains a key barrier facing women.

Gaps in knowledge and extension services can also be a factor in post-harvest fish losses, which are more likely to occur in a context where women rely on traditional smoking as the



## BOX 2

### Gender Food Loss and Waste Methodology: reducing food loss and waste in Small-scale fisheries value chains

Reducing food losses remains a “multidimensional and complex challenge”.\* In fact, overlooking the “underlying socio-cultural, institutional and economic structures in which value chain actors operate” can also be a relevant factor to be considered, such as inadequate equipment and lack of infrastructure. “Losses constitute lost income to fishers, processors and traders but they also contribute to food insecurity because a loss of any fish means less fish available for the consumer.”\*\*

Most women respondents in the FAO small-scale fisheries study in Ghana reported experiencing post-harvest fish losses. On whether the respondents sold fish at a lower price, 82 percent said they did, whereas 18 percent said they did not. The most cited reasons for selling fish at lower prices were a glut, poor fish quality and lack of customers, but also commodity dumping to avoid spoilage or to raise extra money to pay off debts to fishermen. Some women reported COVID-19 as a cause of customer apathy contributing to low selling prices.\*\*\*

Notes: \*FAO. 2018b. *Gender and food loss in sustainable food value chains – A guiding note*. Rome; \*\*Randrianantoandro, A., Ward, A. & Safa Barraza, A. 2022. *Gender and food loss in sustainable fish value chains in Africa. Sustainable Fish Value Chain Development Series No. 1*. Rome, FAO; \*\*\*FAO. 2023. *Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries for Sustainable Food Systems - Consolidated Baseline Report: Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania*. Rome, FAO.

main processing technology (FAO, 2023). These technologies, in addition to being less efficient, also pose a threat to women in the workplace, as fire accidents have been reported during smoking activities (FAO, 2023).

### 4.5 Reduction of women's work burden and gender-based constraints

Women in Ghanaian small-scale fisheries bear a disproportionate work burden and are prevented from accessing technologies, practices and infrastructure that would open the way to gain new skills and opportunities, but also to work in a safer environment.

As reported by women in the FAO study, the processing techniques mainly used include traditional smoking, while other improved technologies such as drying, smoking, boiling and frying are used to a lesser extent (FAO, 2023). Unfortunately, as highlighted by

Adeyeye and Oyewole (2016), fish smoking is a technique exposing women to gases and particles for more than 5 hours a day. Another study has targeted this issue even more specifically for the Ghanaian fisheries sector: by comparing reported health symptoms of women fish smokers with those reported by women engaged in other businesses such as trading and salting, Weyant *et al.* (2022) stressed how poor eyesight, burning eyes and dizziness were symptoms strongly related to carbon monoxide exposure resulting from fish smoking. Fish smokers suffered from impaired vision and burns, as well as respiratory distress, compared to their counterparts (Weyant *et al.*, 2022). According to the results of the study, improved facilities and technologies would significantly improve the health conditions of fish smokers: working in well-ventilated spaces and using improved smokers would harm women considerably less when performing their daily activities in the value chain (Weyant *et al.*, 2022).



### BOX 3

## Gender Transformative Approaches: addressing the root causes of gender inequalities and discrimination

The influence of patriarchal customs on Ghanaian society weakens institutional capability to implement and enforce gender-responsive legislation, ultimately hindering the achievement of gender equality. To tackle the latter issue, gender transformative approaches can be adopted and implemented. Such approaches aim to address the root causes of gender discrimination with methodologies targeted at both the household and community levels. Through the uprooting of long-standing societal gendered structures, gender transformative approaches deliver improved development outcomes, gains in the private sector, and improved project performance and sustainability. This is often possible given the propensity of such approaches to reach beyond the mere individual empowerment of women by tackling systemic constraints to gender equality, that is, by ensuring every individual owns the instruments to become an active agent of change for the advancement of gender equality.

Source: FAO, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) & WFP (World Food Programme). 2020. *Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices*. Rome, FAO, IFAD & WFP.

Not only would improved technologies and infrastructure enable women to work in a safer work environment, but they would also provide women with the tools to work in a more efficient and sustainable manner. Nevertheless, only 43 percent of women in the FAO study had received training on fishery practices (fishing, processing and storage methods). Considering the portion of women who were trained, a vast majority (93 percent) of them claimed that the trainings received were useful: the three main areas or topics were personal hygiene management practices along the beaches, adoption of new technologies in fish handling, processing and packaging, and knowledge on financial and business management skills (FAO, 2023).

Traditional roles and cultural beliefs still exclude women from fishing activities and push them to perform other activities regardless of their characteristics and skills, based on biases and prejudice (Adjei and Sika-Bright, 2019).

However, women have a key role in every step of the value chain and can gain influence as soon as they acquire financial resources (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015); this is why receiving tailored support to enhance entrepreneurial skills and investments in fishing business would be crucial to strengthening women's business activities and enhancing the sustainability of their livelihood strategies. Predefined gender roles and social norms can also ignite harmful reactions as soon as women gain increased economic power as traders and processors compared to male fishers. In fact, GBV is much more significant in communities where women have higher profits, can finance fishing expeditions and also access microfinance (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022). In that case, women are also likely to experience financial abuse when, for example, fishermen who have received money for expeditions do not honour their informal selling arrangements when meeting, thus putting them at risk of contracting

debt and losses (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022). Gender transformative approaches can support the prevention of these negative implications by uprooting gender norms and addressing gender discrimination and lack of alternative income opportunities for women so they can reach full empowerment through capacity development and access to improved technologies (see Box 3).

## 4.6 Gendered effects of climate change and other shocks and disasters in small-scale fisheries

Ghana has achieved the status of a middle-income country and, together with this achievement, it has also accompanied progress with an increase of greenhouse gas emissions

### BOX 4

#### Effects of climate change



The fisheries sector in Ghana has faced a significant expansion, which has brought to light some critical aspects deriving from increased demand and climate change, including a boost in the decline of fish stocks and pollution.\*

As a result of critical aspects impacting communities such as weather events and low catches, one of the major factors linked to climate change hindering women's participation in the fisheries value chains is poverty.\* Women fishmongers have reported that the increase in fuel prices, coupled with the dwindling of catches, has a significant impact on women's economic empowerment, as more often the money invested in financing fishing expeditions does not turn into revenue, but rather into serious losses - which have also indirect socioeconomic costs preventing children's access to education and nutrition.\*\*

Fishing households are struggling to cope with the negative externalities of economic growth, such as oil production's negative impact on fishing communities. In fact, oil exploration is mainly carried out in the same areas where fish production takes place, thus putting additional pressure on livelihoods and increasing vulnerability of fisherfolk by restricting fishing areas, increasing environmental pollution or, for example, damaging the flora of seaweed in marine areas - therefore radically changing and affecting the environment where fish value chains can usually flourish.\*\*\*

In some cases, opportunities deriving from increased pollution can arise for women, as in Ghana they have been reported as the main actors in marine-plastic litter (MPL) collection.\*\*\*\* However, a study conducted by Bowan *et al.*\*\*\*\*\* showed that patterns of women's involvement in the collection, placement and management of solid waste are strongly related to socioeconomic status of respondents, as the linkage was mostly reported only in lower and middle income areas of the surveyed municipality.

Notes: \*Tanner, T., Mensah, A., Lawson, E. T., Gordon, C., Godfrey-Wood, R., & Cannon, T. 2014. *Political economy of climate compatible development: artisanal fisheries and climate change in Ghana*. IDS Working Papers, 2014(446), 1-30; \*\*Sarpong, G. 2022. *How Fishers & Fishmongers Are Battling for Survival on the Frontier of Climate Change in Ghana*. The Pulitzer Center, 20 July 2022. Washington DC, USA. Cited 07 April 2023; \*\*\*Owusu, V. 2019. *Impacts of the petroleum industry on the livelihoods of fisherfolk in Ghana: A case study of the Western Region*. The Extractive Industries and Society, 6(4), 1256-1264; \*\*\*\*Ghana National Plastic Action Partnership (NPAP), 2021. *Gender Analysis of the Plastics and Plastic Waste Sectors in Ghana, Baseline Analysis Report* – May 2021; \*\*\*\*\*Bowan, P. A., Anzagira, L. F. & Anzagira, C. A. 2014. Solid waste disposal in Ghana: A study of the Wa municipality. *Journal of Environment and Earth Science*, 4(4), 10-16.

and deforestation (Tanner *et al.*, 2014). Fisheries are expected to be heavily impacted by climate change, but at the same time the sector is contributing to pollution through uncontrolled trawl-based commercial fishing emissions, rising levels of illegal fishing practices and declining fish stocks of commercial species (Allison *et al.*, 2005; Tanner *et al.*, 2014).

Fish stocks can be heavily affected by upwelling processes occurring off the coast that can affect nutrients and food supplies for fish, but rainfall and migration of fish also play a role in catches (Tanner *et al.*, 2014). Changes to wind and water temperatures can affect availability of fish as much as weather events can damage fish habitats in a stronger way, thus affecting the livelihoods of communities when landing sites are also involved (Katikiro and Macusi, 2012).

At the household level, poverty is a major issue that is closely linked to climate change. An example of this is mangrove destruction affecting women in coastal communities. According to Tanner *et al.* (2014), women rely on mangrove wood as an alternative source of income, especially for paying for fuels and other materials that would otherwise be unaffordable to them, but also to use as a resource for

smoking fish. The destruction of mangroves because of extreme weather events has a direct impact on women's livelihoods, and especially increases their financial vulnerability. In some cases, although household incomes have been reduced as a result of a mix of climatic and non-climatic factors, these factors do not affect various households, including those headed by women and men, in the same way. Therefore, this emphasizes the importance of considering climate change vulnerability in an intersectional manner (Koomson, Davies-Vollum and Raha, 2020).

On the other hand, women can be the main actors in strategies for coping with climate change in the fisheries sector: as described by Dankelman (2008), women in the Volta Region used their knowledge to deal with erratic rainfall patterns and changes in the flow of currents, which were creating difficulties in fish breeding. Women found alternative sources of income that could make them less dependent on fish processing, created informal saving schemes, and also organized themselves into cooperatives.



# 5

## Gender and small-scale fisheries stakeholders

### 5.1 Women in small-scale fisheries organizations

In the FAO small-scale fisheries study, 62 percent of women reported being members of local fisheries organizations, with long-lasting membership. On average, these organizations comprise over 70 members (FAO, 2023). At the community level, Village Savings and Loans Associations play a crucial role in providing support to women's economic endeavours, but also as a space for networking at the social level (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022). Other organizations reported as key actors for raising women's voices in the fisheries sector are women's associations: the National Association of Fish Processors and Traders (NAFPTA), the Development Action Associates and the Central and Western Women Fishmongers Association (USAID, MOFAD and FC, 2022). Benefits reported by women are mainly financial, but also relate to access to markets and inputs as a group; consequently, women gain more power to influence decision-making and send representatives to participate in discussions around marine and fisheries plans at the national level (FAO, 2023).

Women's organizations in the small-scale fisheries sector usually are associations with administrative structures and rules that regulate daily operations for participants (FAO, 2022). Organizations differ according to the kind of activities that are mainly performed by their

members, such as boat owners, canoe owners, processors, marketers or inshore fishers, and are open to putting women in leadership positions (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). As these associations have to sustain themselves through contributions, women involved can either pay regular fees or share a percentage of their profits (FAO, 2022). Despite their newness, these groups meet regularly, have set out clear objectives to obtain visibility at the government level and also provide economic support to members. At the local level, membership is reported to increase negotiating power in terms of prices for equipment purchases (FAO, 2022; Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015).

Benefits in terms of networking, social support and information sharing have also been reported by women participating in these organizations, although increased access to training and technology is a clear gap that would support the groups' development (FAO, 2022). Local fish processors and marketers' associations can provide women access to microloans and support when conflicts arise with other actors of the fish value chains (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako, 2015). As stressed by Amadu, Armah and Aheto (2021), it is crucial for these organizations to build memberships with an active participation of fisherfolk to ensure that social capital acts as an asset for building resilience when shocks occur. Lack of administrative skills and financial literacy can be as harmful to these groups as is lack of communication

among different groups: as reported by women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study, women's organizations are described as supportive to small-scale fisheries development at the community level, while membership in the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA) can raise the profile of women in small-scale fisheries (FAO, 2023). However, NAFPTA's strengthening and support has been highlighted as a key action point, thus ensuring such umbrella organization is more representative, especially at the community level, and also ensuring that key positions are established at the district and regional levels (FAO, 2022).

An example of how these organizations can be effective drivers for empowerment comes from the Densu Estuary, in southern Ghana (Torell *et al.*, 2019). Oyster harvesters in the estuary have organized themselves in the Densu Oyster Pickers Association (DOPA) and have received training through a USAID-funded project on sustainable fisheries management. After one year of the project, DOPA decided to close the

oyster fishery for five months as the stock was dwindling. This decision was made swiftly because of the small and cohesive nature of the group, as well as to tailored extension services, which were targeted to the community through participatory, locally driven processes and through extension officers, who were integrated into the community. DOPA members also played an active role in data collection, which gave them ownership of the data and impacted their leadership in management decisions (Torell *et al.*, 2019).

While women's organizations and associations are effective vessels for improving women's participation in resource management, they do not represent all stakeholders, so these associations must continuously recruit new members to expand their reach. Associations could work closely with traditional leadership, such as chief fishermen, chief fishmongers and other authorities in the community, to extend their networks and build connections with other women's associations and networks (Torell *et al.*, 2019).





# 6

## Conclusions and recommendations – Gender needs and priorities

To achieve gender equality, ensure the full participation of women in the Ghanaian fishery sector and create an enabling environment for women at local and national levels, targeted actions should be enforced.

### Policy and legal frameworks

- New and existing fisheries policies should recognize gender as a cross-cutting issue, including the importance of fostering **gender equality and women's participation in management and decision-making processes**. This includes explicitly requiring the **active participation of women in all management committees** for both large and small-scale fisheries and recognizing the contributions of women's fisheries activities for both trade and subsistence in fisheries management measures.
- Specific **gender units should be established at the ministerial level** to ensure that gender is mainstreamed consistently across all sectors, but especially in the fisheries sector. These **units must be staffed with expertise regarding gender issues and provide adequate budgeting** to reflect long-lasting and efficient support for policy implementation with the aim of achieving gender equality.
- **Gender-responsive coordination and planning should be designed** to create

alignment in gender mainstreaming strategies across the various actors working in the fisheries sector, thus **supporting policy prioritization and awareness-raising** regarding measures targeting gender inequalities and their impact on Ghana's development pathways, but also drive increased funding towards the uprooting of ongoing gender issues.

- Provide sufficient **funding and training for DOVVSUs across Ghana**, including focusing on the establishment and effective, gender-responsive implementation of these units in underserved and rural areas. All DOVVSUs should receive sufficient training and establish appropriate protocols to ensure victims are treated with respect and dignity, and have adequate access to support services from both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms by also **facilitating reporting for victims who are prevented by financial and social constraints**.

### Knowledge generation and data collection systems

- **Enhance national and local data collection and statistical systems to collect information about women's fish harvesting activities**, including for subsistence purposes, and to account for these activities in fisheries and natural resource management and conservation efforts,

including the support to improve monitoring and evaluation systems.

- A national policy regarding the production of gender statistics should be developed to **produce more coherent data that may be used from different ministries** to perform a wider analysis of the status of gender equality in the country. Statistical bureaus should receive tailored training and awareness-raising to ensure that the impact of **sex-disaggregated** data and the relevance to assessing effective actions at the national level is recognized. **Existing infrastructure for statistical data collection should be strengthened**, while coordination among different sources of national statistics should be fostered and investment should be granted towards the enhancement of data dissemination systems and platforms.

### Behavioural change and gender transformative approaches

- As women's empowerment often depends on financial independence, **women in communities should be granted formal social protection schemes** that take into account the high risk and vulnerability that women bear even when financing fishing expeditions or providing their boats to other actors for fishing, especially men. This also applies to women who work in the processing and marketing sectors, as they should also be supported through specific training and capacity development, **providing them with education and capital that enables them not to rely on their partners** to participate in activities or develop their businesses.
- **Women's economic vulnerability should be addressed in a gender transformative way**, thus redressing the cultural norms and biases that see women as the sole bearers of household responsibilities, especially when

it comes to paying for children's education and health treatments. Specific economic support should be granted to households in order to avoid women bearing these costs, while **awareness-raising should be conducted to ensure that men are equally involved in household responsibilities and that women have equal control over household income**. This awareness-raising should serve to reduce women's time burden on household work so that they are able to more fully invest time, energy and income in their businesses.

- **Women's voice and decision-making power should be supported through gender transformative approaches and through fisheries extension services**, with officers that are specifically trained and aware regarding gender issues in Ghanaian small-scale fisheries. These services will make knowledge and information available to women so they can make informed decisions around their business and work activities, especially regarding processing and marketing of fish. **Increased knowledge and techniques for fish processing would lead women to reduced food loss, but also to increased income and decreased exposure to work-related hazards affecting their health**.

### Targeted interventions for women's empowerment

- In the current context of Ghana's economic crisis, women's ongoing, secure and just access to financial capital is critical to avoid exacerbating inequalities. **Gender-responsive microfinance and cash transfers can be used as tools for women's empowerment alongside financial capacity development opportunities**. Targeted packages and interventions should be designed for the most marginalized communities, such as single women-headed households, to reduce the risk of trafficking and child labour.

- Services and resources should be provided to support victims of gender-based violence, child labour and human trafficking in the fisheries sector. **Support for victims of domestic and intimate-partner violence should be gender-responsive.** This could include providing space for women with children, locating shelters near public transportation for access to landing sites and schools, providing legal services and advice including for unmarried women, and linking women to other services in the region to support capacity development and access to capital.
- Women should be **actively engaged in fisheries resource management and in the design of climate adaptation plans,** as their knowledge is fundamental to ensure that their constraints related to resource conservation and climate change are analysed in a comprehensive manner. These plans should **use an intersectional lens to consider all the different needs and constraints that women face at different levels of the value chain,** according to different contexts and wealth conditions. Environmental knowledge should be fostered within communities to avoid further use of illegal practices that are damaging fish stocks and local habitats. Decision-making and resilience to shocks should be secured through the use of more sustainable practices and the creation of alternative livelihood opportunities, for example, plastic waste collection and recycling.
- **Women organizations should be supported in the creation of a stronger network for the existing associations** in the small-scale fisheries sector, which, most importantly could provide existing national organizations, such as NAFPTA, with the space to establish representatives at the district and regional levels. Women's access to technologies and capacity development on fishing-related skills should be increased through these associations. **Administrative and financial literacy should also be developed to strengthen women's livelihoods** and to support the day-to-day administration of women's organizations in order to increase women's bargaining and decision-making power. These interventions should be implemented alongside gender sensitization programmes to reduce backlash and promote cooperation for collective social benefits.

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The Gender Brief is tailored to provide insight into the contributions of women in small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods in Ghana.

Approximately 90 000 women in Ghana depend on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods, mostly in the post-harvest sector. Pervasive gender norms limit women's opportunities and decision-making power at household and community levels, as they face many gender-based constraints in fisheries value chains and they are more vulnerable to intersecting factors such as poverty and gender-based violence.

Targeted actions should be undertaken to address gender inequalities and support women's empowerment in the Ghanaian fisheries sector, including the establishment of gender units at ministerial level, the provision of training and awareness raising to fisheries extension officers and the integration of women's perspectives and knowledge in fisheries resource management and climate adaptation plans.

